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STRENGTHENING DISASTER RECOVERY FOR THE NATION



Strengthening Disaster Recovery for the Nation

VIDEO TELECONFERENCE (VTC)

Region IX

(Pacific Rim)

Time: November 23, 2009, Monday
3:00 PM (Pacific)

Participation Via: VTCs, phone bridge (only) and participating through WebEx

Sectors Represented: Federal and State agencies, nonprofits and private sector and Tribal representation

Note: This product is provided as a general summary only, not a transcript of the discussion.



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Overview Of Video Teleconference Process



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Format

VTC for Region IX Pacific Islands was set up differently than other VTCs in that Pacific Islands participants were asked to respond to questions by thematic topic (like was done in Stakeholder Forums):

- **DEFINING SUCCESS:** (Four (4) questions + *What else would you like us to know?*)
- **BEST PRACTICES:** (Six (6) questions + *What else would you like us to know?*)
- **ROLES + RESPONSIBILITIES + COORDINATION:** ("Five [5] questions + *What else would you like us to know?*")

The following summary of participant comments is organized by thematic response.



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DEFINING SUCCESS



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Defining Success

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There are varying opinions among Pacific Island VTC participants on what constitutes a successful disaster recovery effort. Successful recovery is defined generally by this group as the timely reconstitution of vital lifelines, government services and a quick return to “normalcy” for citizens. It requires a coordinated effort with State, local, county, Federal and private sector assets. Participants note that success might mean one thing to the government, but to a community it might mean something else. For citizens on the ground, it means individual assistance. For the government, it means restoring services and public assistance. There was also discussion about whether success goes beyond restoring the community to pre-disaster conditions to result in stronger communities better able to withstand future disasters.

Participants feel that successful recovery includes short- and long-term phases and that milestones and benchmarks may be different for different perspectives (e.g. government or individual) and for different recovery phases and action steps. Restoration of the economy, return to permanent housing, reopening of roads and closing of the last eligible case are noted as significant milestones among others.

Participants feel most successful recoveries require coordination strategies to be in place ahead of an event (pre-disaster).



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Participant Responses

Q1. (Original Q1) How would you define a successful disaster recovery?

- A successful disaster recovery is when:
 - Electricity is restored to hospitals, government and Federal facilities within 24 hours, to the rest of island within a week. The whole system should be back to “normal” within a year.
 - There is a timely reconstitution of vital lifelines, government services and a quick return to “normalcy” for citizens.
 - There is a coordinated effort with State, local, county, Federal and private sector assets. It is most successful to have this coordination in place ahead of time.
- Successful recovery includes short- and long-term phases. Some things will take longer to accomplish. We can come up with milestones within phases.
- We need to also focus on prevention, as well as recovery. We need to go beyond response. The better you are at responding, the less people are driven to prevention. We need to balance both.
- Rapid recovery and return to normal pre-event conditions are a part of a successful recovery. It entails partnership/cooperation between Federal, State and local municipality resources. Recovery from the 2006 earthquake in one specific state required immediate release of rapid Federal funding upfront, logistical support that went beyond resources of local government, and looking at 30/60/90 days at benchmarks for immediate recovery/response. After that, looked at 180 days or longer.
- With limited resources and capacity in one particular region, the need to shelter for evacuation of humans, protection against spread of diseases and transportation since islands are widespread.

Disaster recovery might mean one thing to the government, but to a community it might mean something else. For citizens on the ground, it means individual assistance. For the government, it means restoring services and public assistance. Benchmarks of success would be different for the two.

Q2. (Original Q2) Are there clear phases in the disaster recovery process that are useful milestones?

- *(Note: Responses to this question were covered in responses to Q1 and Q4.)*



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Q3. (Original Q3) What features of Federal disaster recovery assistance are most important to you?

- *(Note: Responses to this question were covered in responses to Q1 and Q4.)*

Q4. (Original Q4) How would you measure progress and what specific metrics should be considered for a successful disaster recovery?

- When the last eligible case is closed (for individual assistance) would be a benchmark.
- Progress and metrics might be incident specific to each type of disaster or recovery. Reopening a road might be a benchmark, and reimbursement funding might be a related benchmark.
- Cost recovery side can take many years after a disaster. This could be a long-term metric that needs to be added. When you have closed out disaster cost recovery program, this would be a metric of a successful recovery.
- Overarching individual tasks may have metrics/milestones for several functions. Typically, some sort of damage assessment would have to occur. Then debris removal operations and coordination with FEMA/local/State for cost recovery.
 - Short-term goals include:
 - Interim housing.
 - Establishing a disaster assistance center.
 - Reconstitution of government services.
 - Restoration of lifelines.
 - There could be one or more milestones in each one of these.
 - Long-term goals include looking at:
 - Economic recovery, as well as long-term housing for those displaced for long periods of time.
 - Line items in general to look at how we would measure progress, and come up with specific metrics.
- The Small Business Administration (SBA) helped out for previous disasters and their assistance has worked out very well.
- There are very different categories after a disaster.
 - Life, health, safety. Control number of people dying. This is one measure.
 - Property, control property damage.
 - Overall recovery, including economic.
 - In some instances, there can be overkill in one area, and under-servicing in another (Katrina example). Stakeholders should all agree what we are going to work on controlling first. Over-service is frustrating to people on the ground.
- The emphasis should be on the rigor with which we look at coordination.
- In response to complacency, it is not due to complacency that the sirens were not in place. There were other issues involved.
- Others say the measure is getting back to pre-disaster levels.
 - We work with Office of Civil Defense to have procedures in place.
 - We work with nonprofit organizations.
 - We are building up our existing Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) so that we have it in place.



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Q5. (Original Q16) What else would you like us to know?

- Answers to this question informed comments made to other questions and were not specifically addressed here.



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BEST PRACTICES



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Best Practices

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This group feels best practices in recovery speed up emergency relief and follow-up with resource education. Participants say the recovery focus should be on people, building their resilience so that communities can come back.

Participants suggest that methods and responses that have a proven record of effectiveness should be included in disaster recovery management strategies advocating communities embrace what has worked successfully in other places. For instance, they mention disseminating clear and concise communications, and holding community meetings so that communities are informed about what as examples of best practices in engaging local stakeholders and ensuring public participation. Participants note that best practices in benchmarking require a basis of comparison and pre-disaster conditions must be known so the differences from pre-disaster to post-disaster impacts can be identified.

Participants say that there is a need to establish clear priorities and timeframes to return things to “normal;” that recovery teams be organized and coordinated with specific missions and timeframes for achieving those missions; and emphasize the need for strong and informed daily leadership and management. They want to see greater coordination among Federal agencies and Federal and State coordinating officers working together so that duplication of effort is avoided. Participants want to see State disaster emergency plans used; upfront funding sources identified and quick recovery. They say 50 to 80 percent of affected people should be back to normal within three (3) months, after which longer-term recovery efforts can be initiated.

Funding is a concern and participants say that avenues need to be identified to get money put back in operating budgets of agencies that spend it (and not back into a general fund); or fiscal year spending limits need to be removed. They want to see the current reimbursement-based policy for Federal assistance reviewed noting that upfront assistance is needed.



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Participants say help is needed (from FEMA and other Federal agencies) to address the important issue of sustainability. They note that integrating environmental sustainability into mitigation measures requires working closely with States and communities to take advantage of mitigation dollars available every year. Participants say a focus on mitigation results in less help needed for recovery. They note the strong and proactive stance insurers are taking in asking homeowners to “respect” mitigation measures and want to see a mitigation focus pre-disaster. With regard to environmental issue, participants want a return to “better than normal” conditions.



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Participant Responses

Q1. (Original Q5) What are best practices in managing recovery from disasters?

- Best practices were demonstrated in one area's exercise coordinated with FEMA Region IX and one particular state's Civil Defense office. It was a great implementation of national response framework and the hurricane recovery plan. This exercise is led by the State every June.
- Another participant tries to be in sync with the government agencies, as well as private sector and nonprofits. All should be tied into recovery effort. It needs a coordinated effort to bring individuals and stakeholders involved to participate.
 - Within the government, the Office of Civil Defense is the primary command and control center. This happens with every disaster that Guam faces.
 - States use available media.
 - Private companies help assist communities at large and various villages. There are many control centers at the mayor's office.
- We always have response activities coordinators and departmental heads go three (3) deep (primary, secondary, third contacts). The change of administration is a challenge, so we need to keep list updated every three (3) months or so. We reinstate and revisit memoranda of agreements (MOAs), memoranda of understandings (MOUs) around the region, even with nonprofits. Doing this has kept us in good working relationships with our stakeholders.
- During the last disaster, we had some examples of best practices. Communication is obvious. Prevention is very key as are interoperability and communication, and coordinating efforts. The primary stakeholders are FEMA, United States Coast Guard (USCG) and American Red Cross. There is some miscommunication between the local Red Cross and National Chapter so coordination is needed there.
- Another participant notes they have to work with private nonprofits for coordinating recovery events. This includes training people and keeping them trained and teaching them how to document costs. We also have to recognize that there is a lot of turnover. Training is important in managing recovery.
- In areas of disaster assessment, setting up emergency operations centers and having common language that we use as practitioners and trainers is very important. We need continuity – making sure people are getting the same information.
- Very important that we know what the pre-disaster conditions are. We need to determine the differences from pre-disaster to disaster impacts. We have local governments and community people involved, since they know the best in their area. They work closely with State disaster coordinators. It is important that we know what the eligible criteria and priority needs are.
- One participant said, "We need to establish a clear priority and timeframe to 'return things to normal.'" And to make sure we follow State disaster emergency plan. Secondly, recovery teams are organized and coordinated with specific missions and timeframes. Thirdly, upfront funding sources from all levels are identified. Lastly, we need to ensure that there is strong and informed daily leadership and management. Make sure that leadership knows



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what is going on every day, while making changes as needed to make immediate improvements and avoid delays.

Q2. (Original Q8) What are best practices for community recovery planning that incorporates public input?

- After the Dengue outbreak in 2001, ICS (Incident Command System) was identified as a best practice. There is always a need for feedback from the public, to have frequent community meetings and to be transparent.
- An example of a best practice for recovery projects is the reopening of a highway in one specific city. We held several community meetings so communities were informed about what was going on, and so they could be part of the process. We also had to address cultural issues, because of archeological sites that were in the areas that might have been affected by road projects.
- There are many cultural challenges, including a range of ethnic backgrounds and many different languages spoken. We sought assistance of private sector translators in village meetings and outreach. We solicit comments and conduct surveys. That is how we gather input from the public.
- Are we going to take a look at various types of social media and tools in terms of prevention planning and during an event? Can we use that as a tool?
 - Facebook has been working pretty well.
 - We like to use public television.
- Communities do not believe swine flu vaccine is a best practice. We need to do additional outreach.
- One participant noted the use of ham radio to get public involved. However, there are very different perspectives, priorities, and levels of understanding between islands. It requires a lot of resources. It is more useful to actually visit the communities to get their feedback. It is important to engage local community leaders and religious leaders.
- We have Area Maritime Committees, participated in by Federal agencies and private entities that use waterways. Best practices are that committees and relationships are established prior to a disaster. Participants are aware of them so communication occurs prior to, throughout and after the disaster.
- Another participant recommends providing additional funding to Civil Defense, so they can help educate the public during non-disaster times (such as outreach at expos).



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Q3. (Original Q10) As disaster recovery is primarily a State and local leadership issue, what are best practices for the timing (including start and end) and form of Federal assistance and coordination?

- We look at the situation and see how much time is needed to get people back to normal life. Then, it is possible to determine the timeframe that you need to get the mission accomplished. Best practice is that within three (3) months, get 50 to 80 percent of affected people back to normal. After three (3) months, you can follow up with long-term recovery efforts.
 - We are in the process of recovery from the tsunami and earthquake. We are looking at 50 percent of affected people back to normal at this time (within past two [2] months). We are moving very quickly to get things back to normal. We need to identify leadership and make sure that agencies involved are doing the best work that they can and that they can accomplish their mission.
- It is necessary to get the FEMA Watch in the loop from the very beginning, from the very first bulletin. You have to let them know what the direction is and decisions have been made. Director was always on the phone with the Coast Guard. He helped FEMA people get prepped and be on flights. He keeps them on the loop on all issues of conditions (e-mail, fax, phone calls) and has constant communication. It is important to get all stakeholders in for a meeting and to get them to put together resources in case there needed to be a catastrophic recovery.
- We were able to respond within 24 hours to a storm surge, using government agencies and the private sector.
 - We need to be mindful that there may be certain events where we might not be able to get a quick response from local agencies.
- Voluntary agencies have been superb at pre-disaster communication and sustaining efforts year-round. Role of the FEMA Voluntary Agency Liaison (VAL) has been really important to nonprofits and the faith-based community.
- Prepositioning assets prior to impact of a disaster and having pre-disaster contracts in place so people can hit the ground running are critical. When FEMA arrives, we are more ready to determine what we need in terms of Federal assistance.
- One of the critical aspects in any disaster is teamwork of all government agencies – FEMA, local government, villages. This is always a problem. To come up with a very effective plan, and have it accomplished in a short time, would be a successful disaster recovery effort.
- We never saw FEMA in the Katrina response. For the flood in one particular city, FEMA was there ASAP. There needs to be some kind of continuity.
- We need expertise to do assessments of needs of the islands. One of the best practices that we have had in one certain area is having prepositioning in place to help citizens before we get assistance. So far we have been getting timely attention from agencies.



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Q4. (Original Q12) What are best practices for marshaling Federal assistance-both financial and professional support-to support State and local efforts to recover from a disaster, and how can we work together to better leverage existing Federal grant dollars?

- There are quite a few different Federal agencies where grant money is directed to States and territories but sometimes efforts are duplicated. There could be a better handling of grants at higher echelons. There should be an avenue to get money put back in operating budgets of agencies that spend it and not back into a general fund or else do not set limits on what needs to be spent in the fiscal year. Federal coordination is needed with Federal agencies.
- It is important that Federal and State coordinating officers work together, hand in hand, in unison. They need to work together so that efforts are not duplicated.
- Before a disaster when trying to marshal funds (preplanning), it is actually quite chaotic. If ICS is good for a disaster, some form of it (single point, no duplication) should expand pre-disaster.
- Prepositioning of resources, good teamwork and cooperation are important as all are trying to achieve the same goal of restoring the community back to pre-event conditions. It is difficult to do this when Federal assistance is on a reimbursement basis. If some of the assistance can be upfront, that would be helpful.
- We need to ensure that everyone in Pacific Territory Areas keep their memberships in EMA. This helps make people realize that we exist out here, where we are and what our needs are. This includes everything that involves pre-disaster mitigation, grant funding, etc. We also need to let representatives in DC know what our needs are.



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Q5. (Original Q14) What are best practices for integrating economic and environmental sustainability into recovery?

- We are in the process of getting to environmental sustainability in the recovery effort. The land and ocean are our natural resources, and very important to include sustainability. We need to get help from different sources – FEMA and other related agencies.
- One participant has a policy in place, integrating environmental sustainability into mitigation measures. We are working closely with States and communities to use mangrove areas to prevent erosion and other tidal impacts.
- How is infrastructure in regard to the deconstruction of debris set in advance? Are there best practices for this, or is it established after? Not everything can be deconstructed on-site.
 - In previous typhoons, we worked with environmental quality staff in pre-identifying locations for debris dumping. This has worked well, and has been a success.
 - Debris removal has to be addressed immediately in terms of environmental sustainability. Areas need to be pre-identified so people know where to take their debris. Local government and private citizens have taken part in leading debris removal.
 - We had significant debris issues after fire. At that time, there was no debris management plan in place. Since then, we have a draft debris management plan that we are finalizing. The key issue is to have a debris management plan in place ahead of time. There may be a need to move debris to one location, and then manage it from that location.
- We are learning from mistakes from earlier disasters. We are developing a debris management plan that is going through departmental review and adoption; it is very important to have sites identified.
 - The 2007 December storm included flooding from upcountry but we are still dealing with environmental issues since beaches were affected. There are submerged trees in the coastline, which we are unable to remove because we are required to do an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in order to remove trees. There needs to be consideration of a policy to allow flexibility to remove hazards in the coastline and areas affected by storm surge and flooding. Flexibility in environmental requirements would be helpful.
- On environmental issue, we should be returned to better than normal (not just to normal conditions).



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Q6. (Original Q15) What are best practices for integrating mitigation and resilience into recovery?

- In regards to Federal grant dollars, we have been very active to get agencies to take advantage of mitigation dollars that come out every year. Focus is on mitigation, so maybe we will not have to spend so much for recovery.
- We have a project for mitigation and resilience in communities. Most of the atolls suffer from crop damage during storm surges. We are doing a pilot project for food safety; the national government is providing planting materials, crops and supplies to the most affected areas (outer islands). We will be conducting a follow-up trip to verify that what is being provided is growing.
- Since the fire two (2) years ago, insurers have asked homeowners to respect mitigation measures much more than anyone else. They are extremely proactive with high standards about making it better for next time.
- We are very afraid of best practice statements, since they go into detail and micromanage what we are trying to do. We need to make sure best practices are flexible, to give local people an opportunity to implement them in the best way.
- Best practice is to speed up for emergency relief, and follow up resource education. Focus is on people, to build up their resilience. This is what helps a community come back.
- We have been talking about the mitigation aspect of a disaster for many years. From our point of view, we only talk about it after a disaster. It will cost FEMA less if we concentrate on mitigation aspects of preparing for a disaster. With our current disaster, we are looking into setting mitigation programs as priorities, in order to reduce the loss of life and property.
- We would like to see 406 mitigation become as robust as 404 mitigation. This would help a great deal in the islands.



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ROLES + RESPONSIBILITIES + COORDINATION



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Roles + Responsibilities + Coordination

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Participants identify roles and responsibilities as the following:

Local Governments	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• First responders.
State	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Support and as the coordinating agency to provide resources and assistance through State departments and the National Guard.
Civil Defense	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provides initial response along with first responders.
Village Leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are part of the first line, providing temporary shelter and food, clothing, etc.

Participants note that leaders and people within areas have been trained to take the lead in each area to make sure that people are safe before outside rescue arrives. They also note the important role of the private sector citing the recent example of a private funder paying for committee chairs and caseworkers.

Participants note the importance of having seasoned disaster responders “at the table” and the difficulty of changing mindsets about how to apply building codes and mitigation measures. Housing, both transitional and permanent, continues to a significant challenge and a critical unmet need, especially for people who live in substandard structures, highly vulnerable during disasters.



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Participant Responses

Q1. (Original Q6) What are the appropriate State, local and Tribal roles in leading disaster recovery efforts?

- We do not have Tribal entities. We have State and local government. Local county governments are first responders, the State provides support. State is the coordinating agency and assistance is provided through State departments and the National Guard.
- One participant has more Tribes, which are integrated fully on long-term recovery efforts.
- We have a good working relationship with State Civil Defense. Local Civil Defense and first responders provide initial response, and then look to State to coordinate resources.
- There are 75 villages throughout the territory; each has its own mayor and all are under a local government. There is also a territorial government (similar to a State government). There was excellent Tribal and local leadership during the earthquake/tsunami. Village leaders are the first line; they provide temporary shelter, resources of different forms (food, clothing, etc.). People have been trained to take the lead in each village to make sure that people are safe before rescue people have arrived. It is important to maintain and upgrade services in each village, and to provide training and resources to help prepare people in the villages.

Q2. (Original Q7) How can the nonprofit and private sectors be better integrated into recovery?

- This was a big question after the tsunami hit. There was a lot of nonprofit response after the tsunami. Nonprofits (churches, schools, etc.) are not qualified for grant assistance, but are referred to the SBA for low-interest loans. These organizations sustained very serious damages on their properties but are not eligible for grant funding. Can policies be changed to let them qualify for grant funding?
- During fires, coordination was critical. A private funder actually paid for committee chairs and caseworkers. Every seasoned disaster responder was included at the table. Every organization that had something to contribute was involved.
 - A challenge when there is a catastrophic incident is that organizations will self-deploy nationwide, and there is no real coordination. They do not know how to check in and coordinate efforts.
- Civil Defense plays a big role in integrating nonprofit and private sectors – they are part of the plan for recovery. Local Civil Defense coordinates this.



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Q3. (Original Q9) How can Federal, State and local disaster planning and recovery processes and programs be best coordinated?

- The important thing is to ensure a working team between Federal, State and local authorities.
- What is appropriate is to make sure there is a command and control system in place, for delivery of services. It is important to have a single point of information/disbursement of information and services and to avoid duplication and repetition of requirements. This approach streamlines and simplifies the approach to fast recovery. Having flexibility in coordinating efforts is paramount.
- Drills and simulations of the disaster recovery State plan are important so we can get ready for the next disaster. We need to get things done ahead of time, so things will go smoothly and according to plan. We need to develop people to know how to react to a disaster.
- The best example of joint planning at local/State/Federal level was a plan for a Category 4 hurricane striking Oahu. It took about a year to get the planning done, and having a plan in our hands has been a tremendous relief. It was a joint plan between FEMA, State agencies, the city and county.
- Joint planning will take funding and a commitment of time. This is not necessarily a solution for recovery, but a joint recovery process will be an improvement when the response phase is over, when the Federal Coordinating Officer (FCO) leaves the scene, and we are managing public assistance worksheets.
 - This takes up a lot of time and resources, and can make recovery period last longer than four (4) years.
 - It may require reengineering of Federal public assistance programs.

Q4. (Original Q11) What are the greatest capacity challenges that local and State governments face in disaster recovery and what are the best practices for increasing that capacity?

- The biggest challenge is for resources and funding needed to mitigate disasters.
- The cost-share match can be hard to come up with. This is always a great challenge.
- It is very challenging to change mindsets about how to apply building codes, and apply mitigation measures. It can be hard to change this.
- Our most important challenge is how we can survive without any outside help since we are isolated. We need to prepare to survive after a disaster with what we have on the island. This is a major challenge.



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Q5. (Original Q13) What unmet needs are common to most disasters that do not seem to be adequately addressed under the current systems and programs?

- Housing, both transitional and permanent, are unmet needs.
- Housing has always been an issue in most of our disasters, especially typhoons.
- Another participant also said housing, especially for people who live in substandard structures. You will see this throughout the islands, structures that are vulnerable during disasters.
- The coordination of environmental and historic preservation issues is an unmet need. There are often conflicts in terms of figuring out whose area it is, and as a result there can be long delays in getting environmental permits approved. There needs to be higher-level organization.
- A critical issue is providing assistance to high-risk and disabled citizens. How can we improve getting high-risk groups who are most vulnerable ready for a disaster?
- Transportation is an unmet need – determining how we get from major distribution points out to the outer islands. We are locked into air and sea modes of transportation, which are inadequate to rapidly respond and assess situations.

Q6. (Original Q16) What else would you like us to know?

- Answers to this question informed comments made to other questions and were not specifically addressed here.